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International Journal of Historical Archaeology, Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2004 (© 2004)

Symbols, Myth-Making, and Identity: The Red Hand of Ulster in Late Nineteenth-Century Paterson, New Jersey

Stephen A. Brighton[1,2]

Symbols are manipulated to express social identity and to reaffirm or create a sense of place. Smoking pipes recovered from late nineteenth-century privies in the Dublin Section of Paterson, New Jersey, bear the symbol of the Red Hand of Ulster. Today, the Red Hand of Ulster is ubiquitous on Unionist murals throughout Northern Ireland symbolizing Northern Irish Protestant identity. Originally, the Red Hand symbolized the dawn of the Irish High King of Ulster. In late-nineteenth-century Paterson, it is argued here, the symbol was embedded in ethnic politics involving the Irish Diaspora and Irish–American identity developed through the Gaelic revival and Irish–American organizations and labor unions.

KEY WORDS: symbolism; social identity; diaspora; ethnic politics.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeologists often underestimate the potential of small finds to aid in the interpretation of race, class, ethnicity, and gender. Material culture communicates ideas of self-identity and group affiliation. Yet there is a consistent problem in the study of small finds due to a lack of attention to the meanings assigned to the items by their users within certain social and historical contexts. In the case of symbolism on smoking pipes, studies often consider either class or ethnicity as the sole determinant of the social meanings of an individual's experience. Such a focus is an essentialist approach, reducing meaning to one facet in a larger, complex relation (Anthias, 1998, p. 558; Cohen, 1994, p. 205, 1997, p. 129).

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A meaningful interpretation should account for socially and politically-salient categories, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class. These are interdependent components that are constantly blending to give meaning to social bonds that are expressed in cultural and symbolic arenas.

Smoking pipes bearing the symbol of the Red Hand of Ulster and other symbols relating to the 1880s Home Rule movement in Ireland were recovered from three privies associated with Irish and Irish–American tenants in a section of Paterson, New Jersey, known as Dublin. Dublin was home to Irish and Irish–American working class families, who were employed by the surrounding mills and machine shops. The original analysis of the smoking pipes and their symbolism, conducted by Paul Reckner (1999), is part of the report on the excavations.

Paul Reckner's analysis focuses solely on the issue of class relations. Reckner argues that valuing these symbols as expressions of Irishness simply reinforced a static concept of Irish identity (Reckner, 1999). Although his argument is insightful, it downplays the importance of ethnicity imbued in the symbolism within the social and historical context it wished to capture.

My interpretation of the meaning of the Red Hand does not aim to undermine his analysis but to enrich it by bringing ethnicity to the forefront alongside class identity. The symbol of the Red Hand of Ulster, as well as various Irish slogans also found on pipes within the same stratigraphic context, were traditional and, in this case, were used to communicate something authentically "Irish." The Red Hand was used intentionally to impart the Irish experience of struggle and to promote a sense of place in history at a time of an Irish ethnocentric revival in America (Meagher, 1985, 1986, 2001). This revival was a reaction to events and trends in Irish and American society. The symbolism was part of the larger process of creating a national and social Irish–American consciousness that sought to define Irish historical experience and gain an identity and social position in America. This paper will move beyond the original class-based argument to illustrate that the Red Hand of Ulster motif had social value in the ethnic politics surrounding class struggle both in America and Ireland.

HISTORY OF PATERSON

Paterson is located 19 miles (11.8 km) west of New York City in the northeastern corner of New Jersey (Fig. 1). In 1791, the quest for American industry prompted Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, and a new organization, the Society for the Establishment of Useful Manufacturers, to harness the waterpower of the Passaic River and the Great Falls (Fries, 1975). It was not until the first decade of the nineteenth century that cotton millers and other manufacturers established their businesses along the Passaic River. By 1840s, Paterson was the leading cotton-spinning town in New Jersey and the principal supplier of yarn

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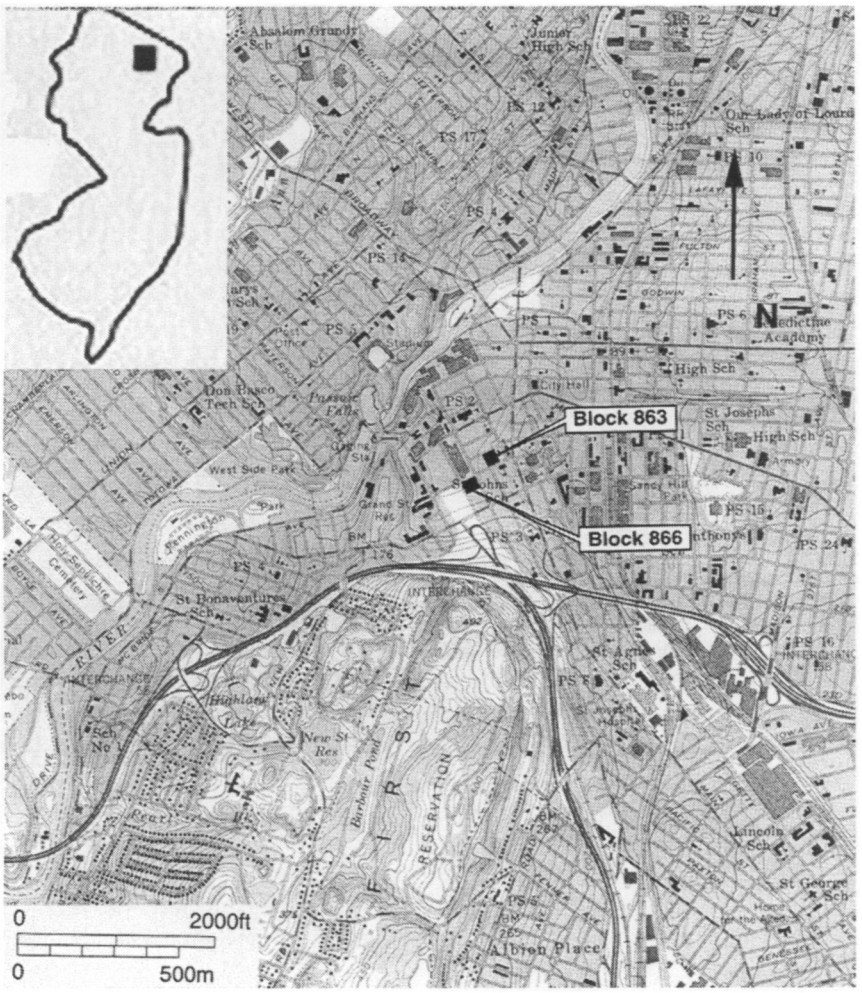

Fig. 1. Paterson, New Jersey U.S.G.S. 7.5 min series quadrangle showing project location.

(DeCunzo, 1983, p. 10). Throughout the nineteenth century, several successful industries emerged including machine works, the locomotive industry, and silk mills (Gutman, 1977, pp. 217–218; Yamin, 1999, p. 9). During the last half of the nineteenth century, Paterson was known as "Silk City," successfully transforming European and Asian silk into sewing silk, ribbons, and broad goods (Goldberg, 1989, pp. 26–31). By 1880 almost 70% of the employees, mostly unskilled or semiskilled, were Irish and first generation Irish–Americans living in the Dublin section (Warring, 1886, pp. 726–727).

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The original street grid of the Dublin section was planned around the existing raceways and mill sites in the 1820s. The area became known as Dublin after the influx of Irish laborers, who settled to work in the surrounding mills and factories after the completion of the Morris Canal in 1830 (Yamin, 1999, p. 10). Dublin's Irish population grew with the arrival of individuals and families who, forced to leave Ireland during the Famine, were part of the larger Irish Diaspora. By the end of the 1850s, Dublin had expanded southward. The northern section was multiethnic and included the Irish, first-generation Irish–Americans, English, and Scots. The southern section, however, was predominantly Irish or first-generation Irish–American and remained so until the turn of the twentieth century (DeCunzo, 1983, p. 83).

Irish men, women, and children prior to the 1870s worked in the mills and factories. Employment varied, but workers were predominantly unskilled or semiskilled. Men were commonly day-laborers, machinists, boilermakers, or steamfitters. Women, principally young and single, were silk winders, pattern makers, and ribbon weavers. By mid-century, children of all ages, most between 8–10, comprised half the work force and worked 12–14 h in the mills as dyers, cotton workers, and clothing makers (Gish, 1992, p. 241). Child welfare reforms were introduced by mid-century, but they were not enforced until the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The Irish and Irish–American laborers were always underpaid in relation to native workers (DeCunzo, 1983, p. 102). Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, Irish males made nearly $100 less annually than American working-class males, although the difference in pay was often greater. In 1874 there was a $265 difference between the two groups (Modell, 1978, p. 212). The Irish working class often was making just enough to meet its subsistence needs. In most cases the income of the male head-of-household was supplemented by the work of the wife, either through employment in the mills or by taking in boarders. The social relations and struggles of the Irish and Irish–American working-class in Paterson constitute a microcosm of the struggles that existed in America.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND SMOKING PIPES

In 1989, John Milner Associates investigated 14 house lots comprising two blocks along Oliver Street in the southern section of Dublin. Twenty-two privies were excavated in the back lots associated with Irish and Irish–American workers' tenements (Yamin, 1999, p. 99). The smoking pipes discussed in my study were recovered from three privies: Feature 8 associated with the tenement at 46 Oliver Street; Feature 120 with 34–38 Oliver Street and 59 Jersey Street; and Feature 10 with 28 Ward Street (Fig. 2). Because this was an urban situation in which multiple families used the privies, it is difficult to associate the pipes with any individual. In the case of the row houses along the southeast corner of Oliver and

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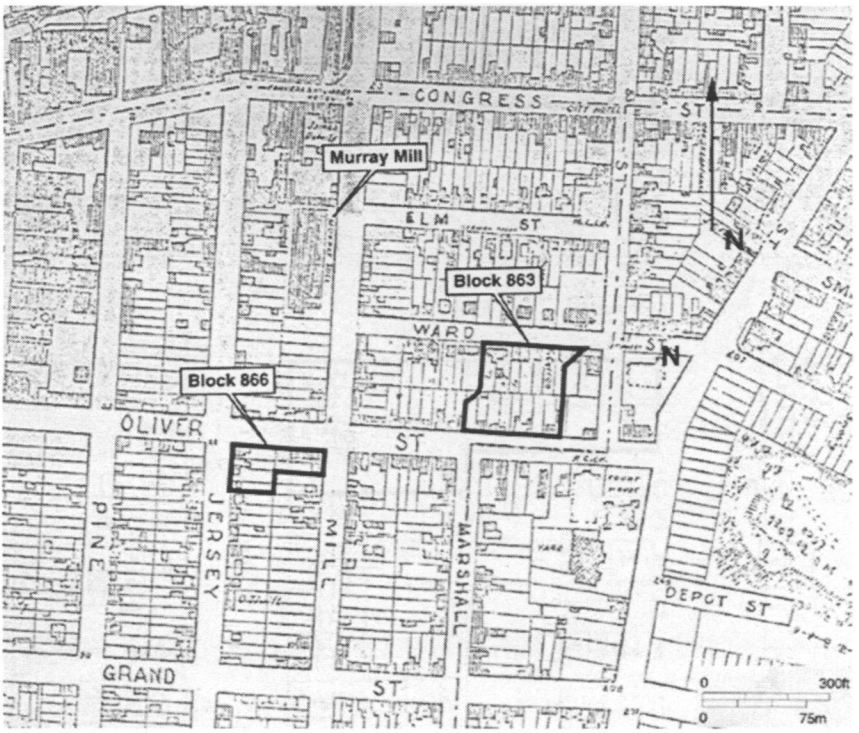

Fig. 2. Beran Map of Paterson, 1860, showing the site locations (Yamin, 1999).

Jersey Street, it is even difficult to associate the pipes with the exact tenement. What can be gleaned from the demographic data, however, is that Irish-born and first-generation Irish–American working class individuals and families lived in the tenements throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century. The privies were closed and filled between the late 1880s and 1900.

Smoking tobacco was an ever-present component of the social environment in nineteenth-century America. In the context of the working class, smoking was a public event and was, therefore, highly visible. The symbolism displayed on a man or woman's pipe bowl or stem publically communicated the person's social and political positions (Cook, 1989). Three ball-clay short-stemmed smoking pipes (known as cutties) with the symbol of the Red Hand of Ulster were recovered. The word "cuttie" refers to the intentional cutting or shortening of long stem clay pipes to make them more easily smoked while working (Cook, 1989, p. 216). The Red Hand symbol can be simply described as a right hand with the palm facing out. In the case of one pipe, there is a heart positioned in the palm of the hand. Two of the pipes have a crosshatched heart, and the third has the Manx symbol of the triskelion on the opposite face (Fig. 3).

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Fig. 3. Pipe bowls bearing the Red Hand of Ulster and Manx "triskelion" symbols (Yamin, 1999).

The triskelion consists of three human legs, bent at the knee, in the form of a circle, appearing to radiate out from a central point (Reckner, 1999, p. 148). Today, it is the emblem of the Isle of Man. The origins of the triskelion are unclear, but it is believed to have Irish connections. One Irish tradition contends that Finn McCool (a character in Irish mythology) created the Isle of Man by ripping up a large sod of earth (thereby creating Lough Neagh) and throwing the sod into the Irish Sea, creating the Isle of Man (MacKillop, 1998, p. 284). In another tale, Manannán mac Lir, known both as a sea-deity and, later, a merchant and pilot, is credited as the source. In Irish oral tradition, Manannán mac Lir dwelt in the otherworldly realm of Emain Ablach, a mythical place off the coast of Scotland in the Irish Sea thought to be the Isle of Man. He was said to have traveled between Emain Ablach and Ireland by riding a chariot over the waves as if on solid ground. The pattern of the three legs is believed to symbolize Mac Lir's ability to walk over water (MacKillop, 1998, pp. 284–285).

Thirteen other smoking pipes with Irish nationalist slogans and symbols were found in the same stratigraphic layers. These included eight pipes stamped "THE GLADSTONE PIPE" and five stamped "HOME RULE" (Reckner, 1999, pp. 148–149). "Gladstone" refers to William E. Gladstone, a strong proponent of Irish self-government and one of the leading figures in the Irish Home Rule movement of the late-nineteenth century. In 1881, Gladstone was the driving force behind a land act that established tenants' rights, including fixity of tenure, fair rents, and free sale. He also passed an arrears act to restore many evicted tenants thus including them in the land act (Hachey *et al.*, 1989, pp. 120–121).

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Furthermore, he was key in bringing the Home Rule Bill to a vote in 1886 (Kee, 1976, p. 82; Miller, 1985, p. 443).

Pipes with the slogan "HOME RULE" signify the push for political and economic freedom and self-government in Ireland after the 1801 Act of Union. The slogan was popular throughout the nineteenth century and had been used by Irish nationalist factions since the development of the Fenian movement in mid-century (Dooley, 2003).

MEANING OF THE RED HAND

Multiple meanings have been attached to the Red Hand motif throughout the course of Irish history. The symbol's meaning put forth here is tentative, but the historical context of the origins of the Red Hand illustrates its common use as an expression of a sense of place and empowerment. In order to demonstrate its significance in Irish–American labor struggles and the Irish Home Rule movement, it is necessary to trace its usage over time.

Today, the Red Hand of Ulster is associated with the tensions between Loyalists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland. The symbol is commonly associated with the former and is often the focal point of Loyalists murals. The Red Hand itself has signified loyalty to England and Protestant ascendancy since the seventeenth century. The Red Hand became the official symbol of Ulster when James I created the Order of Baronets, following the fall and flight of O'Neill in 1607. This also marked the beginning of a large-scale plantation in six of the nine Ulster counties (Miller, 1985, p. 19). James I intentionally chose this symbol to represent the natural and inalienable right of Protestants to own and control the region (MacKillop, 1998, p. 371). It is usually paired with the symbol of the crown and/or the Star of David. The former symbol represents loyalty to the British monarchy, while the latter is thought to symbolize the six counties of Northern Ireland, each represented by one point of the star. To a lesser extent, the Red Hand of Ulster is and has been used by Nationalists. The Red Hand is part of the O'Neill crest and represents all nine counties of the province. Of all the Gaelic clans, the O'Neills were the most resistant to English invasion.

The origin of the Red Hand is unclear, and at least four versions of its genesis can be found, although each story recognizes Ulster as the Red Hand's place of origin. Three stories credit King Hugh O'Neill for the symbol, while the fourth gives credit to the Red Branch Knights. Each tale of origin is based in Celtic mythology and folklore. The first story claims that O'Neill adopted the hand as his heraldic symbol after seeing it on a Monasterboice high cross, which still stands in Co. Louth. The hand on the cross symbolizes the powerful hand of God.

The two remaining O'Neill stories are similar. In each tale the Red Hand of Ulster represents a raised, severed right hand. However, in each story the ethnicity of the hand's owner is different. In the first story, a band of marauding Vikings

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were approaching the coast of Northern Ireland when the Viking leader promised possession of the land to the first man to touch it with his hand or foot. O'Neill won possession by severing his right hand and throwing it on shore. O'Neill then employed the image of the bloody hand as his heraldic symbol (MacKillop, 1998, p. 371). In the second story, rival Scottish clans, racing to Ireland, were the central characters. Again, possession was promised to the clan who first reached land. The chieftain of the Clan MacDonnnell, rather than lose the race, cut off his right hand and threw it on shore (MacKillop, 1998, p. 371).

The fourth story involves the symbolism of the crest of Co. Tyrone. The crest's shield is composed of three elements, each of which are related to the Red Branch Knights. According to the Ulster Cycle of heroic tales, the Red Knights were a band of warriors of the equestrian order who dedicated themselves to the defense of Ulster (O'Connor, 1996, p. 9). At the battle known as the War of The Trees, they fought their enemy until all weapons were exhausted. The Cycle tells that the last knight, armed with a branch from a red tree, killed the last of the enemy, thus protecting Ulster. In this way they earned the title of the Red Branch Knights (www.roots.com/~nirtyr3/). The crest of Tyrone, then, is composed of a red hand (for the knights themselves), ocean waves (representing the knights' travels), and a tree (for the weapon they used in the battle).

IRISH SYMBOLISM IN PATERSON

Material culture does not reflect social identity automatically, but is assigned social meaning where people create space for it in a particular context. Symbolism performs a multiplicity of operations as people construct their understanding of the social world based on their daily experiences (Barth, 2000, p. 31). It can be "true" or "false" and evaluated as justified or illegitimate in relation to the subject and his or her world (Mohanty, 2000, p. 32). The symbol of the Red Hand of Ulster is more than an Irish-"ism." It is part of and profoundly embedded in the differentiations of social relations between the Irish diaspora community and native-born Americans.

Diaspora is a social condition and societal process that signifies transnationality and the struggles fought by incoming groups to define their social position as a distinct community within the historical context of displacement (Clifford, 1994, p. 308). Diaspora and diasporic identity differ from the concepts of immigration and immigrant identity. Firstly, diasporic identity is situated on a large scale and is permanent because it involves having collective homes away from home (Chow, 1993). Dispersal is forced and the event(s) is traumatic and forms the necessary elements to create a shared memory of the "great historic injustice that binds the group together" (Cohen, 1997, p. 23). Secondly, because diasporic groups establish bonds around a collective memory of displacement and violent

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loss, they cannot be "cured" by assimilation, forced or otherwise, into the new place of settlement (Clifford, 1994, p. 307). As a result, the term diaspora represents a constant reevaluation of what group membership means to those who are a part as they collectively experience the process of forging new social relations and sense of place (Fortier, 1998; Panagakos, 1998; Panossian, 1998).

Social identity is always in the process of being created. It never really "is" but is always in "production" as a manner of constantly retelling the past. It is constructed through narrative and myth based on specific patterns subject to and in reference to social positioning. This positioning is connected to historically situated concepts of power, exploitation, and oppression (Bhabha, 1994). Although the formation and process of social identity changes, it does assume specific patterns within the milieu of personal and social relations (Brah, 1996, p. 123).

Patterns reflect the constructs of a group's conceptualization of themselves and differences from others. Patterns are more apparent at the social boundaries between groups, and take the form of *authentic markers* expressing difference through conceptual elements such as ethnicity, gender, religion, and class (Cohen, 2000). Authenticity is a powerful element in the creation and maintenance of social identity and is derived from the acceptance and legitimacy of the meaning and expression of a social group's markers and symbolism (Bhabha, 1994). Authenticity's power is more meaningful when one group comes to define proper schemes of social identity, legitimizing its claims to exclusive and "natural" rights over others (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Paine, 2000).

Inequalities are derived from social differences legitimated by *authentic markers*. Social divisions are created by social values placed on differences in gender, race, ethnicity, and class and are the impetus for social stratification and inequalities (Scott, 2000, p. 22). How social differences acquire meaning is the key principle in the construction and discourse of social identity (Scott, 2000, p. 22). In turn, social identities are used in struggle and political mobilization through appealing to a collective experience, history, and shared economic positions (Bhabha, 1994, p. 35; Gans, 1996, p. vii).

In a diasporic community, group cohesiveness is constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth (Vertovec, 1997, pp. 278–279). Edward Said (1991, p. 55) calls this "an imaginative geography and history which helps the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the difference between what is close to it and what is far away." Imaginative rediscovery is packed with a continued sense of ethnic solidarities and attachments to the symbols of national belonging, and can play a critical role in the struggle for social positions (Anthias, 1998, p. 567; Hall, 1990, p. 224). The political, social, and economic activities of an incoming diasporic group and subsequent generations in the host land are filled with references to homeland struggles (Clifford, 1994, p. 305; Cohen, 1997, p. 105). In any diaspora there is always a "sentimental pathos" towards and an emotional dimension to the symbols of the place of origin (Conner, 1986, p. 16).

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There is a continuing investment, emotionally, economically, and culturally, to the homeland through a range of social organizations. This "return" to the homeland, whether actual or imagined, is critical to the development of social identities in the host land because it anchors the constructed memory by a shared connection (Tölölyan, 1991, 1996; Vertovec, 1997). Over time the relationship with the distant homeland becomes romanticized, yet remains a large part of the diasporic identity. Strong social ties include sentimental expressions through ballads, poems, social clubs, letters and news from home, and material bonds such as sending or raising money for a common cause on behalf of the homeland (Drzewiecka, 2002; King, 1998; Panossian, 1998; Safran, 1991).

Appeals to a distant homeland authenticate ethnic group politics in the host land (Drzewiecka, 2002, pp. 15-16; Vertovec, 1997, p. 279). Legitimating the group's position in both national contexts is called "political bifocality" or "diaspora nationalism" and removes the simple binary opposition between homeland and host land, and allows for a multitude of social relations of belonging, boundaries, and exclusion involving the very subjective postures of citizen and immigrant (Gellner, 1983). Diaspora groups protect themselves from accusations of being disloyal to their new home country while struggling to remain viable political players in the homeland. The group is careful to claim its current citizenship as a primary identification in its activities on behalf of the homeland (Drzewiecka, 2002, p. 18).

In this sense the Irish in Paterson, taking up the Irish nationalist cause and combining it with the struggles for social and political positions in America, were playing an identity game by legitimating their position in two different national contexts. Newspapers such as the *Irish World* reinforced this concept of dual citizenship. It was one of the first publications to compare land struggles in Ireland with labor strife in America (Brundage, 1996, p. 323). In 1880, Michael Davitt argued in the *Irish World* that fighting for a common cause in Ireland was also an aggressive strike against the feeling of inferiority in America, and the Irish in America could gain full status in America when Ireland was free (quoted in Skerret, 1986, p. 127).

Ethnic solidarities and emotions were especially high among Irish–Americans during the Irish Land Wars of 1882. This period marked a rise in Irish–American support for the Irish cause. The Land Wars involved both secret societies and violence as well collective social movements. Rent strikes and the shunning of landlords and land-grabbers were the most effective methods employed by these social movements at this time. The act of shunning was such an effective tool in rural Ireland that it was named "boycotting" after it was first successfully applied to Captain Charles Boycott, a land agent of Lord Erne's estate in Mayo (Hachey *et al.*, 1989 p. 120).

The Land Wars created a renewed sense of ethnic identity in America. Drawing from the rural Irish creation of boycott, Irish-dominated labor groups launched

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successful "labor boycotts" during the 1880s calling for better wages and working conditions (McKivigan and Robertson, 1996, p. 305). In places such as Worcester, Massachusetts, nationalist spokesmen likened the fight for Irish independence to the ideology of America's struggle for freedom during the American Revolution (Meagher, 1985, p. 279). This phenomenon of strong dual national consciousness was prevalent in Irish communities throughout the United States, such as those in New York, St. Louis, San Francisco, Lowell, and Worcester (Brundage, 1996; Clark, 1986; Meagher, 1985, 1986, 2001; Mitchell, 1986; Sarbaugh, 1986; Skerret, 1986; Towey, 1986).

A larger revival movement in Ireland was occurring at the same time as the Irish ethnic revival in America. The Gaelic revival began in the early 1880s (Fig. 4) with the goal of educating the masses and representing Irish culture in order to rediscover and preserve true Irish identity. The revival was founded upon the mythology of ancient Celtic heroes such as those featured in the Ulster Cycle. Irish writers such as Douglas Hyde and Eoghan Mac Neil created socially-effective myths with moral endings that justified the beliefs of and actions toward the advancement of the Nationalist movement (Boyce, 1996, p. 170; O'Mahony and Delanty, 1998, p. 77). Valiant, noble, and willing to sacrifice himself for the good of the people, the Celtic warrior-prince Cúchulainn was resurrected and used as an example of the true Irish nature (MacKillop, 1998, p. 373).

The Gaelic revival provided a sense of empowerment, specifically at the lower end of the economic and social strata of both Irish and Irish–American society. In America, the revival formed from benevolent organizations with names taken from Ireland's preconquest past and included the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Clan Na Gael, the St. Patrick Brotherhood, the Knights of Tara, and the Knights of the Red Feather Branch. These organizations, most considered political and militant societies, expanded during the Land Wars and flourished throughout the 1890s (Brundage, 1996, p. 321). They raised the awareness of Irish history and the struggles in the homeland. Also, they created communal interest in the Gaelic language, history, and sports. In Worcester the Irish petitioned to have Irish history included in the pubic school curriculum (Meagher, 1986, p. 86). In essence, the revival provided a basis for a renewed sense of self, respectability, and cultural strength (O'Mahony and Delanty, 1998, p. 77).

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the developing sense of and activities for promoting Irish nationalism were intrinsically linked to American labor organizations (Gutman, 1977, p. 58). Perhaps the most influential of union organizations was the Holy Order of the Knights of Labor (Voss, 1993, pp. 75–76). The central goal of the Knights of Labor was the eradication of the wage labor system and its replacement with education programs, land redistribution, legislative lobbying, and cooperatives. The link between the Knights of Labor and the land struggles in Ireland began as early as 1881 when Terence V. Powderly (Pennsylvania-born of Irish descent) utilized cooperative and legislative programs

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Fig. 4. The cover art depicting the link between the Gaelic hero and scholar during at the time of the Gaelic revival for *The Story of the Irish Race* (1921) by Seumas MacManus.

to aid in active support of Irish causes (McKivigan and Robertson, 1996, p. 304). Labor unions, such as the Knights of Labor, were quite popular among the Irish–Americans because of their commitment to a common cause (Miller, 1985, p. 524).

The popular working class paper in Paterson, the *Paterson Labor Standard*, was largely responsible for bringing together information concerning the exploitation of the American workforce and promoting the cause of Home Rule and the Land League. At the height of workers' tensions in Paterson and tenant unrest in Ireland, editor Joseph p. McDonnell published the article "Ireland and America" artfully blending the two issues stating "the principles for which the Irish Nationalists are contending are practically the same as those held by the

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labor reformers in their struggle against capitalistic oppression" (Paterson Labor Standard [PLS], 1890). Other Irish–American newspapers such as the *Irish World* likened the inequalities faced both by tenants in Ireland and working class Irish/Irish–Americans with slavery (Bodnar, 1985, p. 111). Such rhetoric helped raise a nationalist consciousness within the working-class community, fusing the cause of liberation in Ireland with a democratic ideology in America (Bodnar, 1985, p. 90).

CONCLUSION

Material culture communicates ideas of self-identity and group affiliation. Symbolism performs a multiplicity of operations in making sense of experiences in the social world. Experience is the cognitive raw material in which social identities are constructed in order to reshape social values. The use and meaning of the Red Hand of Ulster symbol in Ireland is contested and multidimensional, but within the broad social and historical context the symbol has always symbolized empowerment and a sense of social position. In late nineteenth-century Paterson, it expressed a sentimental pathos and connection to causes in the homeland, while at the same time was relevant to the social issues affecting the Irish in America.

Paul Reckner's analysis of Irish symbolism on smoking pipes from Paterson emphasizes class relations. He argues against the dynamic expression of Irishness through real or mythical symbolism in the struggle against social inequality because it reinforced a static concept of Irish identity. Yet, the Irish in Paterson were more than a class faction. They were also an ethnic group, and being considered Irish was perhaps the biggest obstacle affecting their social and economic position. The Irish in America maintained their loyalties and ties to Ireland which, in turn, fostered prejudice and discrimination from mainstream America (Meagher, 1985, p. 273). The Irish and Irish–American workers were aware of this and defined their group membership, not by ridding themselves of their cultural and social history and assimilating into American society, but by integrating into the social fold on their own terms and using specific Irish symbols that expressed their social and ethnic distinctions and consciousness.

The Red Hand of Ulster was intentionally used to express the extensiveness and significance of Irish history. Power rests in its long history, both real and mythical. Only by understanding the origin of the symbol and its use over time and space does it become meaningful. In Paterson, the Red Hand of Ulster became part of the larger process of defining an Irish–American's unique and contested historical experience and social position of being both Irish and American.

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